

Panther team ready to strike when called

Story and photo by Spc.C. Elijah Spencer
211th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — On the front lines, beyond the confines of the earth filled Hescos that line the fire bases along the southern regions of Afghanistan, our soldiers brave the harsh conditions of thin air, jagged-edged rocks, and barren stretches of land. Day after day, these men are constantly in pursuit of the individuals that have oppressed the people of Afghanistan for so long, and now hide in caves on mountains, waiting for a cowards' moment to strike at the defenseless.

While U.S. coalition forces have been successful in their mission in Afghanistan, there comes a time when even the infantry calls for help.

When the men and women of Company C, 1st Battalion, 130th Aviation Brigade of the North Carolina National Guard "Panthers" get that call, not a second is wasted manning their birds of prey, the mighty AH-64 Apache attack helicopter. These aviators take to the skies and render aid to any soldier in need of close air support. "We're like the 911 of the air," said Chief Warrant Officer 4 Carl L. Bauknight, from Oxford, N.C.

The Apache is equipped with a technologi-



Chief Warrant Officer 2 John D. Piland, from Raleigh, N.C. and Chief Warrant Officer 4 Mitch Rose, from High Point, N.C. look out from their AH-64 Apache prior to take off.

cally advanced Integrated Helmet and Designator Display System. The movement of the pilot's head causes the aircraft's weapons system to correspond with sensors in his or her helmet. Wherever the pilot looks, the gun and target designation systems point to that location allowing

the pilot and the selected weapon system to become one in a lethal platform in either day or night conditions.

"They (enemies) really don't want a part of

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Flu vaccinations will give 'shot' at staying healthy

Story by Spc. Kelly Hunt
4th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM, Afghanistan – Personnel working at the Bagram U.S. Hospital are gearing up for a battle against the common flu bug and hope to protect troops from the infection.

Though the dates aren't finalized yet, beginning in the month of October, hospital personnel are scheduled to provide troops throughout base with this year's vaccination.

Influenza, or the flu, "is caused by a virus that attacks mainly the upper respiratory tract; the nose, throat, bronchi and rarely the lungs," according to the World Health Organization.

"(It) is a highly contagious viral infection that is one of the most severe illnesses of the winter season (and) may lead to hospitalization or even death, especially in the elderly," according to the National Coalition for Adult Immunization.

It spreads rapidly and "is easily passed from person to person through the air by droplets and small particles when affected individuals cough or sneeze," according to WHO.

Military personnel are at a high risk for the infection simply because they live in such close quarters, said Col. Judy Tracy, 452nd Combat Support Hospital.

"The flu is a virus and it can spread really fast," she said. "We're in

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World News (Compiled from CNN.com)



Muhammad, right, talks with attorney Peter Greenspun at a pre-trial hearing last week.

Jury selection begins today in D.C.-area sniper case

WASHINGTON — One year after the Washington, D.C.-area sniper killings — and 200 miles away — a Virginia state judge Tuesday will begin the process of selecting a dozen people who will sit in judgment of shooting suspect John Allen Muhammad.

Virginia Judge LeRoy F. Millette Jr. opted to move the trial from Manassas to Virginia Beach in an attempt to find jurors not affected by the sniper attacks nor tainted by the massive publicity the case received.

But few observers of the case believe potential jurors in Virginia Beach will be ignorant of the case, which received blanket media coverage a year ago and has spawned several books and a made-for-TV movie to air Friday.

"This is not going to be something where a jury sits down in a jury box with a clean slate, listens to only the admissible evidence and then makes a decision. That's not this case," said Marvin Miller, a Virginia criminal defense attorney.

To help select unbiased jurors, the judge and parties to the case have established a procedure to screen the prospective jurors — weeding out those who cannot serve for six weeks — the anticipated length of the trial — questioning them in groups, and then questioning them individually about certain matters.

Prospective jurors will be asked individually about pretrial publicity, the death penalty and whether they have personally experienced terrorism.

Muhammad, 42, is charged with murder

and terrorism, both of which carry possible death penalties. The murder count requires prosecutors to prove that Muhammad committed two murders in a three-year period. The terrorism count requires proof that he terrorized the community or government.

In addition, Muhammad is charged with one conspiracy count for allegedly conspiring on the shootings with Lee Boyd Malvo, and with illegal use of a firearm.

All four counts relate to the October 9, 2002, killing of Dean Harold Meyers at a Sunoco gas station in Manassas. Together with the 18-year-old Malvo, Muhammad is charged in 13 shootings that killed 10 during a three-week period in October of 2002.

Army officials in Iraq report Saddam sightings

BAGHDAD, Iraq — A senior Pentagon official sought to play down comments Monday by Army officers in Iraq that military intelligence had reported credible recent sightings of deposed dictator Saddam Hussein north of Baghdad.

"We have clear indications that Saddam was here recently," said Maj. Troy Smith, executive officer of the 1st Brigade of the 4th Infantry Division, which is headquartered in Tikrit.

"Do I know where he is? No," Smith told reporters, but he pointed out that Tikrit is Saddam's ancestral home. "Where else would he go to? He has family and tribal roots here."

In Washington, the senior Pentagon official said: "There is no new intelligence about the whereabouts of Saddam Hussein."

The conflicting accounts came as U.S. officials reported that three American soldiers were killed and 13 others wounded in a series of attacks that began Sunday morning.

One soldier was killed Monday when a homemade bomb detonated near a convoy of three Humvees passing through the town of Jalula, northeast of Baghdad, said Maj. Josslyn Aberle, a 4th Infantry Division spokeswoman.

About an hour later, in downtown Tikrit, another American soldier died when a patrol

of Bradley fighting vehicles came under attack with rocket-propelled grenades and small-arms fire, she said.

The third soldier died Sunday night near Baiji, north of Tikrit, when his Bradley hit an antitank mine.



Environmentalists say whales could be harmed by new sonar system.

Navy to limit new sonar system to protect whales

SAN FRANCISCO, California — The Navy has agreed to limit its peacetime use of a new sonar system designed to detect enemy submarines, but which may also harm marine mammals and fish, an environmentalist group said.

The Navy and the Natural Resources Defense Council, which sued the military on the issue, reached a legal settlement last week in which the Navy agreed to use the new system only in specific areas along the eastern seaboard of Asia, according to documents provided by the environmental group.

The agreement must be approved by a federal magistrate to become permanent, but if implemented the deal would greatly restrict the Navy's original plan for the sonar system, which once was slated to be tested in most of the world's oceans.

Environmentalists say sonar systems endanger marine mammals and fish, especially whales. They point to a different system the Navy used in 2000, when at least 16 whales and two dolphins beached themselves on islands in the Bahamas.

Last year the Natural Resources Defense Council and other environmental groups sued the Navy over the new system, seeking to restrict its use.

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that action,” said Collins.

The primary mission for Co. C is air support security. The Apaches escort all rotary wing missions in Southern Afghanistan, including re-supply and air assault operations.

The nine Apaches that line the air strip at Kandahar also make up a quick reaction force of heavily armed gun ships. They can lay a blanket of Shrapnel from an arsenal of 2.75 inch rockets, high-explosive, armor-piercing 30mm cannon rounds or 100 pound Hell-Fire Missiles. This barrage of laser-guided ordinance can be unleashed on the enemy up close or from beyond the peaks of the numerous mountains that litter the southern region of Afghanistan.

The Panthers have been in Kandahar for two and a half months. Due to their precision flying, expert gunnery skills, and superior coordination with the ground troops they support, the Aviators have confirmed 29 enemy kills.

“The ultimate goal is to effectively support ground forces, to have great communication between the two, and to hit the right targets quickly,” said Capt. Benny F. Collins, Co. C commander,

from Raleigh, N.C.

The Panthers were last deployed to Kuwait in 1998 for five months in support of Operation Southern Watch. The pilots of Co. C unanimously agree that their experience here is clearly different from their time in Kuwait. Some of the major differences are the high altitude, the extremely hot temperatures, and even the type of flying that the pilots do here.

“You can talk about this all you want, but until you fly in Afghanistan, you haven’t trained in these types of conditions,” said Collins.

One of the biggest changes the Panthers had to get used to is the reinstitution of the diving-fire tactic. Realizing that the Coalition Forces are fighting a different enemy, the aviators had to change to this technique as opposed to their conventional method of attack by hovering and firing from a distance.

“The heat, combined with the altitude, and the enemy situation just doesn’t allow us to hover in Afghanistan,” said Collins.

Overall, the Panthers are glad to be here. Originally, they were tasked to deploy to Iraq and were on standby at Fort Bragg, N.C. for two months. At the last minute, their orders were changed

sending them to Afghanistan. Prior to arriving in Afghanistan, the unit spent another four and a half months at Fort Hood, Texas.

Despite the long wait to get here, the Panthers are nothing short of motivated and ready to support any soldier in need of aerial assistance.

“Everybody wanted to get here as early as we could so we could start training,” said Collins. “I’ve said goodbye to my wife six times, but the main thing is we want to make sure the guys on the ground know that we’re here for them.”

As far as the family and friends back home, the Panthers are more than ready to return to them when the times comes. In the mean time, they have a duty to do here and they intend on doing it to the fullest extent of their capabilities.

“We, and the soldiers that are attached to us, have sacrificed a great deal to be here and we’re proud to be doing it,” said Collins.

The main thing the men and women of Co. C want to get across to the soldiers on the ground is that they are there for them and will support them as much as they can. “We want then to know that we’re here for them. We’re proud to be doing what we do, and for them to call on us more often,” said Collins.

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close quarters so it can spread even faster.”

Vaccinations for the disease are a proven way to be protected from the infection. “Vaccination is the principal measure for preventing influenza and reducing the impact of epidemics,” according to WHO. They have been available and used for the past 60 years.

The influenza vaccination is very safe and effective and generally has no side effects, according to NCAI. “The potential risks associated with influenza illness are much greater than the potential risks associated with the influenza vaccine.”

For troops serving in the U.S. military, the vaccination is a requirement, said Tracy. The flu is a worldwide epidemic, but for troops in a deployed situation, it is even more important that they protect themselves from the infection.

The infection usually lasts for about a week and people who suffer from the flu can expect to recover within one to two weeks, but with people living so close together in Bagram, it will be easy to pick up the infection repeatedly if they are not vaccinated.

And “the flu can lead to other infection,” said Tracy. “You could get pneumonia or something on top of that which would be devastating to the soldier.”

“We want to keep our military in top physical condition and anything we can do for them so they won’t come down with these kinds of bugs which can put them out for two weeks sometimes (we’ll do),” said Tracy. “We want to prevent that.”

For that reason, hospital personnel will soon be beginning the vacci-

nation process, offering troops a shot at staying healthy over the winter months.

“We’re going to be giving it until we have everybody inoculated,” Tracy said. “I would expect we would be able to get the people all (done) within a month to six weeks.”

Units that have their own medical providers will be given the vaccination through them, but for those units that don’t have medical providers with them, the vaccinations will be provided through the hospital.

Tracy stressed the importance of the vaccination, especially to the older generation of troops. “It’s especially important for the elderly,” she said.

In annual influenza epidemics, five to 15 percent of the population is affected with upper respiratory tract infections with hospitalization and death mainly occurring to people in high-risk groups, according to WHO. The annual epidemics are “thought to result in between three and five million severe illness” cases and “between 250,00 to 500,000 deaths every year around the world.”

Most causes associated with influenza occur among the elderly over 65 years of age.

People at high risk include people over 65 years of age and older, adults and adolescents with chronic pulmonary or cardiovascular disorders, people who are less able to fight infections due to a disease they have currently, people suffering from chronic illness, and people up to 18 years of age who receive long-term aspirin therapy, according to NCAI.

Dates and times for the influenza vaccinations on base will be announced to troops sometime within the month, said Tracy. For more information, stop by the Bagram U.S. Hospital.

A little angel on earth gets help from CFC-O

Kunsan Air Base, Korea — When Maj. John McGarrity's son Sean was born in 1992, McGarrity was, as any father would be, proud and elated. However, those feelings soon gave way to deep concern when young Sean did not respond in the same ways infants usually do. "Our little angel on earth," as the now 10-year old is affectionately referred to, had a malformed brain.

When Sean was born, McGarrity described his baby's brain as a computer with no video jack. "There were no wrinkles there. His brain was smooth. After three weeks at Wilford Hall in San Antonio, Texas, we learned our son had cerebral palsy."

McGarrity and his wife had never thought about the special needs of children like Sean. These two young parents had a child who at the age of three could not hold his head up.

However, there was hope for young Sean from a Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) charity that recognizes the need to start children at the age of three with intense therapy.

Originally, the program started out as a special needs summer camp of sorts where children could learn to paint and do other crafts. Recognizing the need to support military members full-time, especially young, enlisted working parents, the program became a year-round effort offering residential camping, day-care, sick daycare, respite, emergency lodging and rehabilitation for children with medical, physical or mental disabilities.

This program accepts children regardless of how severe the disability might be.

"Yes, I have received support from my church and community," says McGarrity. "However, there has been and always will be a soft spot in my heart for this CFC charity."

For more information on how to contribute, visit the website www.cfcoverseas.org

(Information CFC-O Press Release)

Bagram Air Base MWR presents

"The Bourne Identity"

1530Z at the MWR building:
A man washes ashore, bullet-riddled and without memory, then races to elude assassins and recover from amnesia.

Tomorrow's movie: "Spiderman"



Local weather

TWO-DAY REGIONAL WEATHER FORECAST:

	Today	Wednesday
Bagram:	Mostly Clear H: 79F L: 45F	Mostly Clear H: 75F L: 41F
Kandahar:	Haze H: 84F L: 46F	Haze H: 86F L: 50F
Kabul:	Haze H: 73F L: 39F	Mostly Clear H: 70F L: 39F
Uzbekistan:	Partly Cloudy H: 80F L: 37F	Partly Cloudy H: 76F L: 37F

Weather forecast courtesy of the Bagram Combat Weather Team

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Coalition Sports Zone

(Compiled from ESPN.com)

McNabb to remain starter despite thumb injury

PHILADELPHIA — Donovan McNabb will remain the Philadelphia Eagles' starting quarterback despite a sprained right thumb that has limited his effectiveness.

"He's working through the pain of that and should be fine," head coach Andy Reid said Monday.

McNabb struggled Sunday in a loss to the Dallas Cowboys, often overthrowing his targets. He was 11-for-26 for 126 yards, his lowest total in a mediocre season.

McNabb, who was hurt in the Sept. 29 victory against Buffalo, played with wrapping around his thumb that extended to his wrist. "It's not an injury he can't play with," Reid said.

McNabb is among a growing list of injured Eagles.

Reserve cornerback Rod Hood will miss Sunday's game with New York with a hamstring injury.

Wide receiver Todd Pinkston received good news from an MRI on Monday for a bruised left knee and is considered day to day. Pinkston was injured near the end of Sunday's loss to Dallas.

Running back Brian Westbrook has a hip pointer and is day to day. He was injured late in the first half.



McNabb threw for a season-worst 126 yards on Sunday.



Fenway Park will be patrolled by the FBI, the National Guard, baseball security officers and police on foot, motorcycle and horseback.

Baseball security aims to keep Fenway friendly

BOSTON — By the time Manny Ramirez made his menacing move toward Roger Clemens, Kevin Hallinan was already trying to control the fallout. The fight brewing on the field wasn't his concern — it was how the fans would react.

Hallinan, major league baseball's security chief, met with Red Sox and law enforcement officials and they decided to cut off beer sales at Fenway Park right then, three innings early.

Then, he walked from Canvas Alley — the tarp storage area on the first-base side — to the concourse to make sure the message had gotten out.

"We went directly to a beer stand and attempted to buy a beer. They said, 'Sorry, we're shut down,'" Hallinan recalled Monday as he prepared for the fourth game of the AL Championship Series. "We went from one [stand] to another and it was: 'No good,' 'Shut down,' 'Finished.' I'm going to say it took five or 10 minutes, and it was done.

"If we pull the switch, we want to make sure that the switch works. It worked that day," he said. "Hopefully it will continue to work."

In the wake of Saturday night's bench-clearing brawl between the Yankees and Red Sox players, security officials are re-examining the plans they hope would keep a minor skirmish from escalating into an all-out riot.

Although deployment was already high because of the importance of the game and the nature of the rivalry, security will increase for the rest of the series.

Hallinan declined to give details of the plans, but he confirmed the area in and around the ballpark will be patrolled by the FBI, National Guard, baseball security officers and police on foot, motorcycle and horseback.

On Sunday, police in riot gear took up positions in and around the ballpark before Game 4 was postponed by rain.

Bryant's defense team lives up to reputation

EAGLE, Colo. — Dozens of reporters scribbled furiously in the tense courtroom as the first details emerged about the rape allegations against Kobe Bryant — described by an investigator as a friendly encounter that quickly veered out of control.

Then Pamela Mackey stood.

She referred to the alleged victim six times by name and dropped a bombshell question to the detective: Could the woman's injuries be consistent with a person who had sex with three different men in the three days?

A frustrated, angry judge halted the preliminary hearing until Wednesday.

Legal observers say the move was vintage Mackey — a carefully crafted line of questioning designed for maximum impact and backed up by a thorough knowledge of the prosecution's evidence. Critics say she violated the spirit of laws designed to protect the disclosure of the sexual history of rape victims.

"She wanted the public to talk about the victim being sexually promiscuous and poison the jury pool," said Wendy Murphy, a former prosecutor and a professor at the New England School of Law. She thinks the tactic may have backfired and instead made people feel sympathy for the woman.

Afghanistan Hot Topics



(Compiled by CJTF-180 Public Affairs)

Seven are killed in attack by Taliban suspects

By Carlotta Gall

KABUL, Afghanistan (*Washington Post*) — Suspected Taliban fighters killed at least seven people and wounded two in a bold attack in the early hours of Sunday on a government district office in the southern Afghan province of Zabul, local security officials said.

An American soldier was wounded in a separate attack on Sunday, when gunmen opened fire on a Special Forces unit training the Afghan National Army on a firing range on the edge of Kabul, the capital. NATO peacekeepers in Kabul captured a man suspected of being one of the three gunmen, said a spokesman for the United States military at Bagram Air Base.

The attacks came a day after a jailbreak by 40 suspected Taliban fighters from a prison in the southern city of Kandahar. The escape dealt a blow to the government of President Hamid Karzai, which is struggling to contain a violent insurgency by suspected Taliban fighters.

Five or six of the prisoners were believed to be important Taliban figures, the Kandahar governor, Yusuf Pashtun, said Saturday. Six security guards were also missing and were believed to have helped in the escape, because the prisoners had been shackled and had dug a 30-yard tunnel to get out. No escapees have been caught, police officials said Sunday.

In the latest attack, up to 80 suspected Taliban fighters on motorbikes attacked the district office and police station in the Arghandab district of Zabul Province. They set the district office on fire and killed four soldiers and three other workers, said Hajji Saifullah, military division commander of Zabul Province.

Officials said they believed that the attackers had crossed the border from Pakistan.

Afghan jail officials fired after escape

By Noor Khan

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan (*AP*) — Authorities in southern Afghanistan have fired the head of a prison and other members of its staff after 41 Taliban prisoners escaped by digging a tunnel, the head of police said Monday.

The superintendent and between 25 to 30 staff were suspended Sunday because of negligence, said Brig. Mohammed Hashim, the head of police in the province of Kandahar, where the prison was located.

The fired officials were also being questioned “to determine how the Taliban escaped despite maximum security,” Hashim said.

Some former Taliban commanders and the brother of former Taliban Defense Minister Mullah Ubaidullah were among the convicts who escaped Saturday. Authorities said they took about a month to dig the 30-foot tunnel.

Prison officials have said they did not realize there had been a jailbreak until they noticed the empty cells. Forty-one of the 54 Taliban housed in the prison got away, prison officials have said.

Hashim said the new jail superintendent has been asked to step up security.

Kandahar is the native town of Mullah Mohammed Omar, the head of the Taliban whose government was ousted as a result of U.S.-led operations in Afghanistan in late 2001.

The escaped convicts had been arrested by Afghan and coalition forces during the past year from different parts of the country. Hashim said they have widened hunt to recapture the men, but have not been successful so far.

"Um, can someone put me through to maintenance?"



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By Kevin Kilgore

Laugh Support